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The Vision of Anton

With this booklet go our greetings and a wish that this New Year and every New Year may bring you joy and ever increasing success

Cordially yours

The H. W. Wilson Company

"Where there is no Vision, the people perish"

The Vision of Anton

As told by

Walter A. Dyer

The H. W. Wilson Company
White Plains, N. Y.
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The Vision of Anton

ONCE upon a time there lived a near-sighted and obscure clock-maker in an ancient town in Flanders. It was in fourteen hundred and something, at about the time when new continents were being discovered, and old continents were being ransacked for whatever might serve to enrich the life of Europe. We call it the period of the Renaissance, and this is the story of the renaissance of Anton, the Flemish clock-maker.

ANTON was apprentice to an old craftsman who made clocks to help very rich people to know the time of day. No one but the rich could afford to buy clocks in those days, so the old clock-maker needed but one assistant. They were crude clocks with but one hand, but they served the purpose. Anton, however, had a soul in his body, and he became very tired of bending eternally over his work bench, making one-handed clocks for people he didn't know. His was a restless sort of soul, but a starved one, and it didn't know how to show Anton the way to better things.

So Anton decided to find out for himself. As he went about the streets of a Sunday he heard of the good gray monks that lived beyond the hill. He was told that they were wise and kind, and that they made sure their entrance into Heaven by many prayers and

much fasting. They were so good that they had time enough left from their prayers to engage in scholarly pursuits. In short, they lived an ideal kind of existence and one that Anton thought would satisfy the cravings of his soul.

So one day Anton left the old clockmaker and journeyed over the hill to the monastery of the good gray monks. They took him in as a lay brother and set him to weeding the garden; but soon they learned that he was skilled with tools, and they gave him the task of building the new altar in the chapel.

When the altar was nearly finished the abbot of the monastery came to Anton and said: "My son, I perceive that thou hast much cunning. Canst thou carve a legend for the front of the altar?"

"I can, Father," said Anton.

So the abbot sought for a legend that would fit the space on the front of

the altar, and after much searching he brought to Anton this:

"Where there is no Vision, the people perish."

Anton accordingly selected a piece of hard, close-grained oak, and began to carve the legend. Now Anton possessed enough of the craftsman's soul to make him strive to carve the legend well, and he spent many days and took infinite pains. And as he worked he said the words over and over to himself:

"Where there is no Vision, the people perish."

He found himself wondering what these words meant, and as he carved his perplexity grew upon him. At last he could contain himself no longer, and he went to the abbot. "Holy Father," said he, "I am much troubled to know the meaning of the words thou hast given me to carve."

Now the abbot had selected the legend without great thought. It sounded well, and it was the right length. So he made answer lightly. "Those, my son, are the words of a Wise Man of old. They refer to that divine guidance which saves men's souls, and which comes only through prayer and fasting."

But Anton had prayed and fasted, and no Vision had come to him.

He asked his brother monks to explain the words to him, but they could not satisfy him, and Anton nearly went mad in the endeavour to understand.

When the carving was complete and the altar finished, Anton found no more work that interested him. He looked about him, and saw the monks feasting and fasting, praying and working, but he could not discover to what purpose.

"If it be true that without a Vision the people perish," he said to himself, "shall we not all perish? Not even the good gray monks have a Vision. They know not what a Vision is."

So gradually he became dissatisfied with the monotonous life of the good gray monks, and their tiresome prayers and fastings to save their souls, until at last he could stand it no longer, and, never having taken the vows, he left the monastery. It was then that he bethought himself of the old clock-maker for whom he had worked in the town. He remembered how wise he was, and he sought the familiar shop. The old clock-maker was glad of the return of so good a workman, and received him joyfully. Then Anton told his story—how he had longed for something to satisfy his soul, how he had failed to find it even among the good gray monks, and how the

words of the legend had perplexed him.

Then spake the wise old clock-maker. "A Vision," quoth he, "is something good and lofty and desirable which the soul may see, and having not, may reach forth to obtain. Without a Vision the body may live, but the soul is starved. It is death in life. Men may eat, and drink, and sleep, and laugh, and work, and quarrel, and beget children, and die, but all to no purpose. They might as well die in the first place, and so the Wise Man saith, 'Without a Vision, the people perish.'"

"And what may I do to get a Vision, that I may live?" asked Anton. "He that seeketh, findeth," replied the clock-maker.

"Where shall I seek?" asked Anton. "At thine own work bench," was the answer. "Thou hast been to the monastery of the good gray monks and

found no Vision there. Thou may'st travel the world over, and no Vision will reward thy search. Look within thy heart, Anton, even into its hidden corners. Whatsoever thou findest that is good and worthy, examine it. Thus wilt thou find thy Vision. Do thy daily work, Anton, and let thy Vision find thee working. Then shalt thou be ready to receive it, and the meaning of thy life and work will be made clear to thee."

Anton marvelled at the words of the wise old man, and pondered them in his heart as he went back to work at his bench. And every day he talked with the old clock-maker, and strove to learn, until at last the light broke in upon him, and he understood. For the meaning of the legend appears only through much thought and self-examination.

A day came when the old clock-

maker arose no more from his bed, and Anton took his place as master of the shop. "Now," he said, "I will see if I can find a way to work with a Vision, for I know it is better than to work without one."

Every Sunday he went through the market place and talked with his fellow-townsmen. He found that there were many things good and lofty and desirable that were lacking in their lives, but he could discover no way to supply them. His soul was reaching forth, but it had not yet laid hold on a Vision.

One day in his shop, however, a Vision came to him. It was a little Vision, to be sure, but it was a beginning.

"I cannot give bread to all the poor, or bring happiness to the miserable," he said. "I know only how to make clocks. So I will make a clock for the

people, that they may have what only the rich may buy."

So he set to work and built a huge clock, with two hands, like one he had seen that came from the South. Its face was two cubits across, and it was fashioned to run in all weathers. Beneath the face he carved and painted a legend:

"Where there is no Vision, the people perish."

In twelve months the clock was done, and he received permission to place it on the tower in the market place, where all men might see it and read the time of day. Many came and saw, and learned to tell the time from the figures on the dial, and the clock became famous throughout Flanders.

But there were many in the countryside who seldom came to the town, and so never were benefited by the clock, and it occurred to Anton one

day that the reason for this was that the roads were so poor. He was now a man of substance and influence in the town, so he went to the burgomaster and told him that he would like to build better roads for the country people to use in coming to town. It took him a long time to make the fat burgomaster see this Vision, but at last he succeeded, and the upshot of the matter was that in a few years there were fine, smooth roads running in all directions.

Anton's fame spread throughout Flanders, and to make a long story short, the king at last sent for him and made him a counsellor at the royal palace. This gave him a chance to broaden his Vision. He saw a greater and a happier Flanders, with the people prosperous in trade and industry and art, and when he died, full of years and honour, he left Flanders a better place because of his Vision.

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